

Multi-scale approaches to understanding urban-tourist sprawl and its implications for water use

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The extraordinary spread of second-home and tourism-driven sprawl has not been matched by the availability of better statistical information or better planning tools adapted to changes in the socio-economic profile of communities or in territorial organization. The complexity of the phenomenon partly explains why urban morphology and changes over time are not easily interpretable as emergent spatial expressions of changing socio-territorial relationships. This interpretation and the assessment of sprawl can benefit from using data from multiple sources: specifically, targeted mapping of very high resolution satellite imagery, cadastral data, and census data. The contribution presents a data-driven approach to integrated sprawl monitoring with implications for research on second homes in studies about tourism. This approach has been tested on Mediterranean coastal destinations of Spain. Understanding the spatial impact of low-density development is pivotal for analyses focusing on the underlying causal linkages between tourism and socio-ecological change, such as the relatively lax urban development legislation or the export of second-home demand originating in distant locations which, in turn, is being met and satisfied by the supply available in mature destinations that actively promote second-home tourism as a strategy to maintain their tourism market share. The results also show a polarization in access to second homes between international and national owners on the one hand and a social differentiation within places on the other. The current crisis strengthens and deepens this divergence. Another, equally important aspect of these changing socio-territorial relationships is the nexus between settlement and land use patterns and water consumption. In particular, the tendency of exploiting water resources with increasing intensity to support the expansion of this urban development model is showing that this engine of growth contains within itself sustainability contradictions that seriously question its viability in solving the economic crisis while, at the same time, it may be aggravating local environment and natural resource crises.